

**Preserving the World's Great Cities:
The Destruction and Renewal of The Historic Metropolis**

Anthony Tung
(Clarkson Potter, 2001)

In 1995 Anthony Tung, a former New York City landmarks-preservation commissioner decided to visit 22 cities from Amsterdam to Vienna, and from Cairo to Kyoto to learn more about the interwoven tales of urban destruction and renewal using his professional lens of preservation and planning. We benefit from his travels in this wonderful (if rather exhausting) 469-page book that was clearly fun for him and could be equally fun for regional stewards interested in the future of cities in the 21st Century.

While written before the events of September 11, New Yorkers who are now engaged in the process of rebuilding their city would do well to learn some of the lesson outlined in this important book. After visiting his cities, Tung returns to the roots of Jane Jacobs with his emphasis on maintaining the fabric of neighborhoods: isolated from the environment in which they are constructed, solitary buildings provide little insight into either history or the human soul. While Tung isn't against modernism, he points out that historic neighborhoods and the buildings that constitute them are "a finite resource from a closed period of human evolution." Once we lose the historic parts of Athens, Rome, Beijing or Kyoto, they can never be regained.

Some places seem to do a better job of preserving their traditional architecture. He specifically focuses on Amsterdam's core row houses along its canals, which were saved in the 1950s, and the Paris 1974 land-use plan that designated nearly 60% of the city as a historic zone. He clearly has a warm place in his heart for Paris and for London – two world cities that developed in very different ways (Paris with a design and London from the Great Fire) but with remarkable results from both a preservation and vitality point of view.

While Tung's preference is clearly for preservation, especially in neighborhoods, he also recognizes that tearing down and building up again is a vital part of the "creative destruction" inherent in modern economies. He would like regional stewards to get the balance right so that our cities can be "built to last," based on preserving the best while moving into the future.